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CORNEY GRAIN.

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LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

CORNEY GRAIN.

BY

HIMSELF.

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.
1888.

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CORNEY GRAIN. BY HIMSELF.

CHAPTER I.

Interviewing Myself—How Reminiscences are Manufactured—My Earliest Recollections—Sermons and Sleep—First Impressions of Music—The Village Waiter—My Early Musical Efforts—My First Play—Some Early Experiences of Critics—An American Portrait—Amenities of Criticism—I do "Effects and Elements"—A Practical Joker—My Legal Career—Good-bye to the Bar.

THIS is essentially an age of interviewing and of gossip; the world is being flooded with reminiscences, and every one who has anything to say is saying it in hot haste, lest he should be forestalled by another reminiscence-monger. Shall I then hold aloof from the great army

of autobiographers? No! I will fight in the ranks with my brave companions of the pen, even though I handle that dangerous weapon somewhat awkwardly; and I only trust that I may not inadvertently wound the feelings of any one by my clumsiness. Should I do so, I beg to apologise in advance and throw myself on the mercy of a kind and indulgent public!

And I know I can rely on the public and the press. They have been such good friends to me. They have borne with me in all my shortcomings, when I have broken down on first nights—it happened in 1871, and I shall never forget my misery—when I have put before them crude and imperfect efforts, for I never consider my sketches "fit for publication" during the first week of their existence.

During the early days of a public per-

former, of whatever capacity, a kind word goes so far, and I have every reason to be thankful. As one gets older one shakes off the adverse criticism, but when one is young it clings and galls ; it may be salutary, so is the mustard plaster, but it is decidedly unpleasant while the irritation lasts.

Therefore I ask the press and the public to respect my confidence in them, and to be kind to my humble efforts.

I was offered a chance the other day of being interviewed ; the writer said he would be so glad to get my ideas on my vocation and on Art in general. I replied that I thoroughly appreciated the compliment, but —that I had an idea—an idea that I imagine has occurred to many others of late—viz., that I would be my own Interviewer. Interviewed by oneself ! A pleasant idea. The Interviewer and the Interviewed would be so

thoroughly in accord; they would work with one mind, in a mutual spirit of close neighbourly affection, each endeavouring to bring the other forward and modestly keep himself in the background. I made up my mind; and my Interviewer raising no objection, we started our scheme. The captious cynic might object to it as a scheme of Mutual Admiration. We deny and repel the accusation. The scheme is one of Mutual Aid!

I asked a distinguished humorous writer the other day why he didn't write his Reminiscences. "My dear fellow," he said, "I haven't enough imagination. I should have to invent all my best stories!" I submit that this is unnecessary. You can take all stories and declare they happened to a friend. It is a dangerous game, yet I have known it carried out most successfully, but by a very able *raconteur*. He would

generally begin thus: "As the late Lord So-and-so said." Did some rash youth say, "I thought Sheridan said that," he would look at him pityingly and say, "Yes, it is a common fashion amongst the uninformed to attribute everything to Sheridan. It was really said by Lord So-and-so!" I admired that man, he had courage and an imperturbable countenance, but, strange to say, his Lords So-and-so were always dead and could contradict no more.

I, or rather we, have not his courage, and we will—*i.e.*, the Interviewer and myself—confine ourselves to strict fact.

The Interviewer shall not put any questions, but I will answer a question which may or may not have been put. This is a favourite method in some modern poems of a melodramatic tendency. It is generally an old man, who is apparently one of the unem-

ployed, with a turn for rhyme. Sometimes he suddenly bursts out with—

"How Farmer Goodyear met his death?
By *accident*, you say!
Old Benjamin knows better;
And I'll tell ye—(whispers), 'twas *Foul Play*"!!!

Here in four lines we get the narrator, old Benjamin, Farmer Goodyear, and the cause of his death—and no question asked.

Sometimes it takes a homelike form, such as—

"A pint of 'arf-and-'arf, sir?
Well, I doan't mind if I du,
For the work *is* rather 'ard-like,
And the sun be 'ot, 'tis true!"

Under any circumstances it is ingenious, and I adopt it with much satisfaction.

Thus: What were my earlier impressions of music? No one has asked me this question, and perhaps it is a question my Interviewer did not wish to ask, knowing that the answer

might take so much longer than he wished. But by my process, which I admit I have borrowed from the modern poetry aforesaid, I make him ask the question, even if it be against his wish and inclination.

What were my earliest impressions of music ?

My answer is that my earliest impressions were that music had no charms for me.

I was born in a small village some four miles out of Cambridge. Picture to yourself a by-road turning off the road to Newmarket —a flat country, then a Rectory and Church, a dirty pond, some farm-buildings and cottages; on the opposite side of the way the remains of the village stocks, the Rose and Crown, kept by one Muggleton (good name, I always thought, for a publican) ; then more cottages, a farm with orchard containing an excellent mulberry tree, the blacksmith's ; then a

cottage tenanted by an old Mrs. Oliver, who prepared feathers for feather beds; then Hancocks the carpenter's house; and then in some meadows, or, as we called them, closes, our house! A farm-house, covered with ivy, with pretty lawns and gardens, and a moat running round three-quarters of the grounds. A commonplace picture, you will say, of a Cambridgeshire village. Quite so, thoroughly commonplace. We boasted no remarkable characters in our village; perhaps the most remarkable was Mr. Hancocks aforesaid. He was a bleary, red-faced, red-eyed old man, with a stubbly unshorn chin and a paper cap. He was principally noted for being frequently drunk, habitually using bad language, and more especially for having once been a clown in a circus.

There were no village schools; I believe an old Mrs. Chapman kept a dame's school,

but I doubt if she could read. The clergyman of the parish did no visiting among the poor; he was a canon of Ely, and I particularly liked the period when he was in residence, because his *locum tenens* presented me with a little box of sweets every Sunday. There were no amusements for the people of the parish—only the Village Feast once a year, which began and ended in beer. The church services were bald, meagre, and altogether disgraceful. In winter there were no lights in church, and the sermon was read by the light of a bedroom candle, which was handed up by the footman. Whether it was the association of bed with the candlestick, or the sermon, I don't know, but the result was sleep. Then we knew the sermons by heart, or should have done had we ever listened. They recurred at regular intervals, and the potato disease always brought out a

very old friend—on Resignation. We decorated the church at Christmas with extreme simplicity; a gimlet-hole was bored in the top edge of the pews, and small pieces of evergreen were stuck in, and generally declined to stand upright. These sparse and diminutive boughs rather gave the impression of a field that has been bushed for the prevention of poachers' nets. But the crowning point of the service was the music. The clerk (one Gilson, who soled and heeled shoes in the world) left his desk and went up into a little gallery, in which sat certain gentlemen, viz., Mr. Pomfret, Mr. Muggleton, and Mr. Lane. The two former played clarionets, the latter the violoncello. As a trio the combination of instruments is odd, but not so odd as the sounds produced by the executants. There was no attempt at harmony, or even of melody, in unison. Each individual went

his own way, or rather the way his instrument chose to take him. The clarionets were particularly erratic in their ways, and produced "alarums and excursions" at the most unexpected moments. The clerk gave out one line of the hymn, and then proceeded to sing it as a *solo*, while the clarionets and violoncello gambolled round the melody—not quite there, but there or thereabouts. We never joined in, but stood respectfully listening to this nasal-voiced shoemaker snuffling forth some dreary tune, while Discord reigned triumphant round and about him.

These were my earliest impressions of music. But there were pleasanter impressions at home. My sisters, who were grown up when I was still quite a little fellow, were musically inclined, and my elder sister possessed an extraordinary natural gift—she

played well at sight and from memory, sang sweetly, and was an admirable accompanist. She is gone now, poor soul; and by her death I lost the best and truest friend I ever had. The earliest song I can remember her singing to me began—

"My father's a hedger and ditcher,
My mother does nothing but spin,
And there's nobody coming to marry me,
And the money comes slowly in.
And it's oh! dear, what can the matter be?
Oh! dear, what shall I do?
And there's nobody coming to marry me,
Nobody coming to woo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo:
And there's nobody coming to woo!"

Then I remember the music after dinner-parties. I often came in to dessert, and was so shy in those days that I used to cling to my father's side and eat grapes with my eyes shut. I remember the waiter so well who helped on those occasions. He cut hair

by day and waited at night. In those days champagne was not so common, and sherry and hock went round at dinner, and after dinner port wine ruled. I can hear the voice of that waiter now as he suddenly startled you by confidentially saying into your ear, "Sherry-or-'ock, sir?" as if it were one word. Years after, when grown up, I was dining out in the neighbourhood, and suddenly the old familiar question was blown into my ear. I thought he had been dead for years. No! there he was, looking exactly the same, and he may be alive still, for all I know. He would be about a hundred and fifteen by this time.

After dinner, music began. What times they had over the glees! "Blow, gentle gales!" Oh that agonizing moment when it comes to "Hark! a signal—a signal rends the air!" "Hark!" is on the second beat of

the bar, but nervous terror sets in, and it is given on the first beat, to the utter confusion of the accompanist and other singers. Then "The Red Cross Knight," which lies so high for the sopranos, and consequently leads to a series of dismal squeaks.

But the greatest effort of all was "Yes, brothers, yes; it is the midnight drum!" I think it was a trio. There came a point in it when the original melody had to be taken up. The first singer said "Yes!" the second "Yes!" the third "Yes!" then all three had to count and come in at a given moment with a stentorian and decided "Yes!!" Oh the agony of that period! They counted with the whole of their bodies; their frames quivered with counting; they gave an agonized look at each other; the moment had come. "YES!!!" they roared, and the company breathed again; a sigh of relief went up, for

we all knew the trio so well that we counted with them; you saw every brow puckered with care, all the lips involuntarily giving "One, two, three!" and at the "YES!!!" we gave a sort of gasp and snort of relief.

Then came my turn, when I contributed my little mite to the entertainment. My *répertoire* consisted of "Charlie is my darling" and "Cheer, boys, cheer." I had been taken to Cambridge to the Theatre Royal, Barnwell, to hear Mr. Henry Russell in his celebrated entertainment, and I was taken captive by "Cheer, boys, cheer," which was then the rage. I had the pleasure of being introduced to Mr. Henry Russell a year or two ago, and found him ready to sit up in the smoking-room of the Pavilion, Folkestone, till early hours, and tell anecdotes by the score.

Was I precocious and able to play the

piano at a very early age? Not a bit. I went to school, learned to play the piano in a somewhat perfunctory manner, received a prize for music (I was the only one who learnt), and at the age of fourteen went to Germany to study German. I continued to take my lessons in music, but only as an adjunct, as it were. I heard my first opera in London before going to Germany: *Fra Diavolo*, with Angelina Bosio as Zerlina, Ronconi as Lord Allcash, Marai as Lady Allcash, Zelger and Tagliafico as the brigands, and, I think, Gardoni as Fra Diavolo. My previous theatrical experiences were small. I once saw Wright as Paul Pry at Cambridge; and I was taken when about eight years old to the Lyceum to see *The Chain of Events*, in which, I believe, the late Charles Mathews and Madame Vestris appeared.

When did I begin to sing comic songs? I was reading for the Bar during the years 1863, 1864, and 1865. Then I first saw Mr. John Parry; and the seeds were sown.

In 1865 I first acted in a back drawing-room in a real piece. I have looked out an old scrap-book, dusted it, and it lies before me as I write, with its accusing record. I am ashamed to turn over the pages and to think of the calm, cool impudence—partly, let us hope, attributable to that ignorance which is bliss in youth—which enabled me to undertake the part of Desmarets in *Plot and Passion*!! The Marquis de Cevennes was played by the late Mr. Calthrop, better known to the public as Mr. John Clayton; and Henri de Neuville was played by —— No! I had better not mention the name. He is a judge now, and is very serious. But as I turn over the pages I blush to think of my

iniquities, my dramatic iniquities. An amateur actor begins by giving pleasure to himself and affording amusement to his friends. If he continues at this game and persists in his audacious efforts, he is pretty well certain to become the "professional amateur," a very melancholy person, who has all the tricks of the trade at his fingers' ends without the necessary experience. The pleasure he affords himself by his acting increases in proportion to the decrease in the amusement he affords his friends. He has become sufficiently acquainted with the outline of the Art of Acting to have attained mediocrity, and mediocrity is dull.

On looking through my old scrap-book, I find myself acting at St. Martin's Hall, where, by the bye, Mr. and Mrs. German Reed gave their first entertainment in 1855, entitled *Holly Lodge* and *The Enraged*

Musician, by William and Robert Brough. This was before they began to give the entertainment at the Gallery of Illustration in Regent Street. St. Martin's Hall subsequently became the Queen's Theatre, then became Clerical Stores, and now, I think, is a coach-builder's warehouse.

Then I find myself playing at the Polygraphic Hall, King William Street, Strand, where Mr. Woodin, but recently deceased, gave his entertainment of *Our Carpet Bag;* this Hall then became the Charing Cross, the Folly, and "Toole's Theatre." About this period the *Era* newspaper gave me as nasty a thrust as I had ever experienced in the shape of criticism; that I thoroughly deserved it I am perfectly willing to admit, but the pain of wounded vanity at the time was bitter. But just imagine my performances; what must they have been

like? A raw, lanky, slim (yes! at that time) youth of twenty—two yards of painful incompetence, nevertheless I probably did not think so then, and the criticism touched me very sorely. This is what it said:—

"Mr. Potter (R. Corney Grain, Esq.) is, perhaps, a very difficult character to portray, but Tom Taylor, Esq., could never have intended him to be made a decrepit idiot. We are not given to understand that Mr. Potter's voice has turned 'again towards childish treble,' neither is there any reason why he should hobble through the comedy like a broken-kneed and aged cab-horse!"

With this criticism, which caused me exquisite agony twenty-one years ago, I may couple one of a still more virulent nature which was forwarded to me a few months ago. I can honestly say that it has not caused me pain, for the simple reason that

the whole British public, even the "cultured" public, are included in its sweeping condemnation. Here is my portrait :—

"PLEASED WITH A RATTLE, TICKLED WITH A STRAW."

From the "Chicago Tribune."

"One of the favourites of London this season in an amusement way is a man with the very attractive name of Corney Grain. He is an enormous man—tall, with a tremendously powerful body. His shoulders are broad and exceedingly thick, and, as he stoops badly, it makes them look still more gross and awkward. He is a mouse-coloured blond, with sallow complexion, dull, sleepy blue eyes, a large mouth, and thick pug nose. His forehead is low and retreating, but he partly hides it by a loose wave of hair. This

man is considered the great wit in London at present, and his appearance is the signal for a laugh before he opens his mouth. I think it would be easier for Americans to laugh at him before he had opened his mouth than after. He is simply a diluted music-hall singer—a music-hall singer with all the fun and dash left out. He seats himself at the piano, and the audience laugh. I heard him at a concert the other day at which all the music was good and classical. This man closed the entertainment with one of his songs. The audience consisted of some of the best people in London—people who are among the representative cultured society of the city. Yet there was no part of the programme which received such applause and attention as the shrieking of this coarse, elephantine humorist. He sang a vulgar song, without wit or originality, of a Scotch-

man's coming to London and seeing the sights and describing them afterwards to a friend at home. The great point of the song was that all of the women that he saw wore very low-necked dresses; and if his wife did the same, he would beat her and send her to bed. The audience fairly shouted with appreciation of this delicate satire, the women enjoying it as much as the men. A friend told me that this Mr. Corney Grain was invited to Marlborough House to sing to the Prince and Princess of Wales last Sunday evening, and among others he sang this same song. The Prince of Wales went into such fits of laughter over it that he nearly fell off his chair. The only way that I can account for the English people enduring such stuff is that they are so devoid of wit themselves that they seize upon anything which is labelled funny in order to laugh."

What have I done to offend "him"? or "her," is it?

There was one delightful performance given at this period at the Bijou Theatre, attached to Her Majesty's, burned down some years ago. *The Lighthouse*, by Mr. Wilkie Collins, was played, and poor Palgrave Simpson took the chief part in it. Never shall I forget his accents of melodramatic despair when, prior to the commencement of the piece, he came on to the stage to see that the scenery was right. "Jack!" cried he to Mr. John Clayton (still acting as an amateur)—"Jack!! here are we supposed to be starving, and they've painted a ham and pickles on the wall!" Then the man who said, "One night I was taken by some mugglers!" The audience could not imagine what "mugglers" were, until it occurred to an astute individual that "some

mugglers" was the melodramatic way of pronouncing "smugglers."

I took no part in that performance, except as an "effect." A large party of us were told off as "effects and elements." I did a distant gong or bell at sea. I remember the scene well: the director of the storm was on his knees in a state of profuse perspiration, reading the "cues" from a "prompt copy" by the light of a wobbley candle on a kitchen-chair.

"Now then," he whispered hoarsely, "wind, please; another howl of wind—softer—die away—keep the wind steady—faint cheer at sea—louder—louder! Now gong! Have you got the soapsuds ready for the spray and foam?" One zealous individual was working away hard, whipping up the soapsuds with a painter's brush. "Now cheer again. Got the rope ready to throw in

when he comes to the window of the light-house? Another howl of wind!!"

At this moment Mr. Clayton advanced to the window. "It is the *Lady Grace*," he cries; "she nears the rocks!" "Now then, ready with the soapsuds—now!" The zealous individual who had whipped up the suds sent a dash of foam into Mr. Clayton's face; but his zeal outstripped his judgment, the brush was seen by the audience, and Mr. Clayton was sent spluttering away, nearly choked by soapsuds. "Now then, the rope!!" Mr. Clayton advances to the window again. "Now for the rope!" Mr. Clayton receives the rope in his eye! I don't know whether the audience were amused, but *we* were, behind the scenes.

Then again there was a friend of mine who was the *esprit malin* of all these perfor-

mances; his tricks were perhaps slightly mischievous, but they certainly afforded amusement afterwards, if not at the time. There was a performance of *The Lady of Lyons*, in which I took part. I remember it well, for something went wrong with Claude Melnotte's sword, and he insisted on using mine. I gave it up to him, scabbard and all, and shortly discovered the nature of the accident. The scabbard was broken, and my sword refused to return to its sheath, and insisted on going through it and sticking out. My friend (wild horses shall not drag his name from me, for he is now married and a serious literary man, and has cast off all the follies of his youth and the recollection thereof) played the part of the second officer, supposed to be a very dashing young soldier, ready at any moment to die for his country. "Aha!" he says, "promotion is very rapid

in the French army." My friend appeared as a maimed and decrepit old warrior, apparently eighty years of age, and speaking the lines in a quavering voice, weak and broken with age. Needless to say, the scene was ruined. Then in rehearsing a piece he would change his conception of a character every day. One day he rehearsed it in broken French, another day in Somersetshire dialect, another day as a Scotchman, and would finally play on the night of the performance as an American. Once he played a Hindoo servant with a brother *farçeur*, and they began a conversation in a sort of jargon with the names of real people, including the audience and actors brought in here and there. Nothing could stop them. The hero of the piece was fretting and fuming; the audience roared, and the more they did so, the more the other actors raved and

swore. These men were playing the fool and stealing their laughter.

On one occasion he played a nice trick on me. The scene represented a gambling room in a private house. I was at the piano singing some little French or Italian air, not comic, but quaint and melodious. Soon the audience began to titter. Why? I could not guess,—my song was not comic,—I sang on—the laughter increased—and eventually ended in a roar. I left the piano in disgust, and then I discovered the cause of my fiasco. My friend was gambling with his *last penny*,—tearing his hair, going through remorseful ravings and gestures—the despair of the ruined gambler in dumb show for a penny!!

But to return to my legal career, which was just beginning, for I was called to the Bar in April, 1866. It was in jeopardy. I

began to sing and give entertainments at Penny Readings (there were no Primrose League Concerts in those days), and such-like festivities. I thought nothing of entertaining or trying to entertain people for *two* hours! And now, after eighteen years' experience, I fight shy of one hour and a half. I wrote a medley song called "Richard Cœur de Lion," and in 1867 another called "Romeo and Juliet." The latter has survived, and will attain its majority this autumn. I seemed to get into a whirl of parties and amateur theatricals. People I did not know began to ask me out—only in the evening; my position was not sufficiently secure to warrant a dinner. "Would you mind? just a little song, one of your charming little quaint things!" I thought them sincere in those days, but, remember, I was not used to "Society," and knew not its ways.

I did not know the class of "Society" ladies, wealthy and titled ladies, too, who could write as one wealthy and titled lady actually did to a friend of mine: "Dear Mrs. ——, could you come with your charming amateurs and give one of your charming little plays? I have got the King and Queen of —— coming. Do if you can. If you cannot manage it, do you know of any *cheap* glee-singers?" I knew not the ways of these people. I plunged into the vortex; my legal *dégringolade* had begun. Mr. John Parry had retired into private life. My old friend Mr. Arthur Cecil made his *début* in 1869. I was weaving my fate—in February, 1870, I sang at a public concert and received a fee of one guinea! In May, 1870, I joined the German Reed Entertainment, and said good-bye to the "Bar and its moaning."

CHAPTER II.

What am I?—My Critics and Audiences—The German Reeds—Waxworks—"Nasty Notices'—On Tour—Dressers and Linnets—Liverpool Dressers—Something like a Voice—Sunday and the Wigs—A Cheerful Voyage—Provincial Stages and their Shortcomings—Dressing under Difficulties—Theatres at Watering-Places—A Break Down—Trains and Temper—Our Dolls' House—Noah and his Discomforts—Rehearsals—Mr. Alfred Reed.

IN May, 1870, I took the final plunge, deserted my somewhat neglected profession of the Bar, and became a member of *the* profession, as it is described in a spirit of banter by the smartly written journals of the day. But stay, am I an acknowledged member of *the* profession? The members of *the* profession repudiate us, I

believe—we are Entertainers, our stage is a platform, the characters in the pieces are called "illustrations," and the pieces themselves designated "first part" or "second part," as the case may be. They will have nothing to do with us, and the only recognition they accord us is that they frequently come and see our humble performances, and I may add that we are always very glad to see them.

I asked a dramatic critic once why we never got a notice of the Entertainment in his paper. His reply was, "You see, my dear Grain, the musical critic and myself cannot agree about your Entertainment, *i.e.*, the German Reed Entertainment; *he* says it is not music, *I* say it is not the drama!" So between the two stools we fall to the ground, the only consolation being that the Entertainment still goes on; and so, for the

matter of that, does the Dramatic Critic's newspaper. Then, again, it is the favourite device of a certain race of critics—not the critics of the great daily journals, who have reached a middle age of tolerance and dignified recognition of all dramatic efforts, however humble, but of the younger critics, who feel it incumbent on themselves to be smart in their writings at any price—to commence a notice of the Entertainment something after this fashion :—

" The German Reed Entertainment is one of those peculiarly constituted institutions that have always received the support of the 'goody-goody' and the 'strait-laced.' Hither the young Curate brings his mamma and sisters with a feeling of absolute security that the blush will never be brought to his own smooth, pale cheek, or to the equally smooth though more ruddy cheek of his maternal

parent and her innocent offspring. There is nothing in the Entertainment to cause a moment's uneasiness to the Guardians of Mr Gilbert's typical 'young person,' or that could possibly bring a blush to the brow of a Bishop. Human passion is never hinted at; the want of smoothness in the course of true love never gets beyond a slight misunder standing; and the whole Entertainment reminds one strongly of the series of songs written by a lady composer for a girls' school, which contained neither love nor high notes."

How many years have I now seen the foregoing paragraph, or something very similar, as a commencement of a notice of our Entertainment! But I can sympathise with those critics: I have scribbled myself at times, and I know how useful that sort of paragraph is in journalism. The paper is crowded, cut it out! The paper is a little

short of matter, leave it in! And I know it is always done in a spirit of good-humoured banter. They do not really mean it; or if they do, they approve of the system in their heart of hearts, for I have found nearly all of them ready and anxious to supply some of the "songs without love or high notes" for the delectation of those very audiences so smartly described. There is also another point in connection with this smart description of the Entertainment. We are rather—nay, very—proud of the fact that the Bishop, the Curate, and the "typical young person" *can* come in safety and security from blushes and misgivings, and we are rather proud that the Entertainment has managed to exist and flourish, though in a quiet, modest manner, for thirty-two years this 4th day of February, 1888.

The German Reed Entertainment began

with a sort of preliminary canter at St. Martin's Hall, Long Acre, in 1855. In February, 1856, Mr. and Mrs. German Reed settled at the Gallery of Illustration in Regent Street. They carried on the Entertainment by themselves until 1860, when Mr. John Parry joined them. In 1867 he retired. Then the little Entertainment gradually developed into pieces such as *Ages Ago*, by Mr. W. S. Gilbert. In 1879 Mrs. German Reed retired, after about fifty years of public life. She quietly retired at the end of the summer season. There was no formal leave-taking of the public, no kissing on the stage, or wreaths and floral tributes; no more "last appearances," "positively last appearances," and "positively final last appearances." No, Mrs. German Reed retired as quietly and modestly as she had always lived, taking with her not only the good wishes, but the

love and affection, of all those who had been fortunate enough to be associated with her. I do not think there is any one who ever had the privilege of her acquaintance who has not a kindly and affectionate feeling for "Mamma," and who would not join with me in wishing her long life and health to enjoy her well-earned repose.

In 1870 I made my *début* in a sketch called *The School-feast*, and I was very kindly treated by the Press; for though the sketch contained the germs of one or two good ideas, it was very weak and flimsy at the best. If it seems so to me now, what must it have appeared to the critics at that time, when they saw and heard me seated at the very piano and in front of the very scene but recently quitted by the great master of his art, John Parry! I had the pleasure of making Mr. Parry's acquaintance soon after

that time, and I still treasure the list of subscriptions he used in his last sketch, *The Public Dinner*, which he gave to me one day.

I shall never forget an occasion when Mr. Arthur Cecil and myself went down to Mr. S. Brandram's house in the country, to take part in some impromptu waxworks. I hope Mr. and Mrs. Brandram will forgive the mention of their names, but I take the liberty of doing so, as they recall one of the pleasantest evenings I ever passed.

The great tableau of the evening was *The Judgment of Paris.*

Mrs. Brandram was Juno; Mr. Arthur Cecil was Venus, and a very dishevelled and dubious Venus he made, in a long, fair wig and white table-cloth; I was Paris, with a football for the apple; and last and not least, Mr. John Parry was Minerva! And what a Minerva! Mr. Brandram wound up the

figures with a fishing reel, and delivered an excellent lecture upon them.

There were other "tableaux," but this made the greatest impression on me. Minerva's expression has haunted me to this day.

The last time I saw Mr. Parry before his death was at a dinner given by him a day or two after his final appearance at the Gaiety Theatre in 1877.

It was funny to me to read in the *Musical World* of the year 1837, picked up at a book-stall, of Mr. J. Parry, jun., as he was then called, making his first appearance in light operas at the St. James's Theatre, and singing sentimental songs at concerts, such as "The Auld Kirkyard."

In the same number I also came across a criticism of a little play by Boz (Mr. Charles Dickens), in which the writer expressed his opinion that he "would rather have originated

one or two of his serious sketches, with some of the scenes of this little drama, than half the bepraised and bequoted humour of the 'Pickwick Papers,' which, after all, is of a character calculated to make a quick appeal only to the great bulk of the reading public; and the great bulk of the reading public Mr. Dickens must have correctly estimated by this time."

It is an encouraging thing for a young artist to look over some old criticisms of great men in literature and art, and to find their earlier efforts, and sometimes mature efforts, abused in no measured terms. It gives him hope, and buoys him up against the depression arising from "a nasty notice."

When I joined the Entertainment in 1870, the company consisted of Mr. and Mrs. German Reed, Miss Fanny Holland, and Mr. Arthur Cecil. The programme was

Ages Ago, by W. S. Gilbert, my sketch before mentioned, and an adaptation by Mr. Burnand of *Les Deux Aveugles* of Offenbach, entitled *Blind Man's Bouffe*. *Ages Ago* was an excellent piece, with charming music by Mr. Frederic Clay. It had a capital run from November, 1869, to the end of the summer season of 1870. It was the title of this piece that puzzled an acquaintance of mine so much in a letter written by some lady. My friend asked me if we had ever played a Greek piece at the Gallery of Illustration. I said, "No," and asked why. My friend showed me the lady's letter, in which she stated she had been to the German Reeds' to see a piece called *Ag-es-a-go*. The writer of the letter had divided the words thus at the end of the line, *Ag;* then at the commencement of the next line came *-es Ago*.

In the autumn of this year came my first experience of touring. We began in Liverpool, and it was there I had some opportunity of studying the remarkable ways of our "Dresser." One day I noticed a paper bag on a shelf. I thought it contained buns or biscuits. Suddenly it moved slightly, as I thought. Was it so, or an optical delusion? I heard a slight rustling; it couldn't be the bag. I remembered a silly old riddle about making a—bun—dance; it couldn't have come true. Again the bag moved. I felt frightened. Suddenly the bag seemed to jerk itself along the shelf. I cried out to the Dresser to come quickly. "Lor,' sir," he said, "it's only a little linnet as I bought cheap to-day off a man in the market!" Poor little linnet! The Dresser painted some of its feathers green and red, made a little perch that fitted into his button-hole, and the poor

bird was taken round the country with us, fastened to this perch by a loop round its body. I forget the linnet's fate, but I fear it was sad. This Dresser was an extraordinary man. He went once to a country house to put up some scenery for some private theatricals. On the off night he amused the house party with a little entertainment of his own. We asked him what it was. "Oh! I just giv' 'em a bit of *Amlick*" (*Hamlet*), "and sung 'em 'Tea in the h'arbour'"! But his greatest speech was when we told him to take off his hat in our dressing-room. "Gentlemen," he said, "I am neither a serf, nor a slave, nor a liveried servant."

His knowledge of the Queen's English was likewise "extensive and peculiar." On one occasion at rehearsal we asked for a chair with a high back. He said, "I only 'ave one: that there 'preddel' chair." This

puzzled us so much, we were obliged to ask him to produce the chair. He meant a "prie-Dieu" chair. If he had to take a musical cue, he would say, "Oh! I see, sir; then I comes in when the h'orchestra begins them 'trimlets.'" Whether he meant "triplets" or "tremolo" we never discovered. On another occasion, being told that we should not want a piece of furniture that had been ordered, he said, "Never mind, sir. I can make it come in 'andy. I'll *neutralize* it for the h'amatoors." A blue sky and snowy landscape he described as giving such a *dissolute* effect—desolate he meant; and on being asked of what wood a certain piece of furniture was made, he got into the most hopeless slough of misplaced letters "H" I ever heard. "Some say it's h'oak; some say it's h'ash; some say it's h'elm. But whether it's h'oak, h'ash, or h'elm, h'elm,

h'ash, or h'oak, I'm sure I can't rightly say for certing!"

Liverpool seems to possess a curious race of Dressers. There was another one three years later who rejoiced in the name of Sexton. He had the faded appearance of an operatic chorus-singer by daylight, one of those unemployed peasants who are always asserting and exercising their right of meeting on the stage, whether it be in the King's Council Chamber, the Queen's Boudoir, or a Woodland Glade. His hair was shaved off at the temples, worn rather long, and a soft wideawake was perched insecurely on the side and back of his head, like unto the manner of the unemployed operatic peasants aforesaid. He had once been to Knowsley, and everything he saw brought back vividly to him the memory of the late Earl of Derby. "Ah! sir," he

would say, "if the late h'Earl of Durby 'ad but seen this performance, 'ow 'e would 'ave apprusshiated it!"

There were queer people we met in Liverpool. We asked a gentleman to recite on one occasion in our lodgings. He looked round; the room was very small, and he said, "I am perfectly willing, but my voice is so extraordinarily powerful, I am wondering if the room would stand it."

Then, again, there was the timorous and o'er-modest lady who let lodgings which gentility terms apartments; she was about sixty, and her sister sixty-five, but they refused to let their apartments to Mr. Cecil and myself—they doubted the propriety of the step, as they were two lone maidens.

Then there was the cheery gentleman who entertained us one Sunday, and insisted that Mr. Arthur Cecil should see his pigs. In

vain poor Mr. Cecil pleaded his ignorance of the pig in its raw state; in vain he protested! "Harry," said the impulsive gentleman, "take Mr. Cecil out and show him the old sow!" And out Mr. Cecil had to go and see the old sow.

It was during this tour that we had a memorable journey from Cardiff to Bristol by steamer. Mr. German Reed went to London by rail, and said we were to cross to Bristol by steamer, taking with us the scenery of *Ages Ago*. He said we should so much enjoy the trip up the Avon.

In *Ages Ago* five pictures came to life at midnight, the five pictures representing five centuries of costume. We arrived at the Quay. The counterfeit presentments on the scenery looked very ghastly and worn by daylight; to use a more modern term, they looked decidedly "chippy." They were

coaling the steamer; she was in a filthy condition of dirt and coal-dust; the cargo on board consisted of twelve sacks of onions, which brought tears to every eye, a drove of dirty pigs and an equally dirty drover, and the scenery of *Ages Ago*. The first thing the pigs did was to take refuge behind the scenery, from which they were dislodged at intervals with imprecations by the drover and appalling grunts and squeaks by the pigs. The steamer canted right over to larboard or starboard, I don't know which; at all events, she was all on one side. It was the 5th of November, bitterly cold. The wind blew the coal-dust into our eyes; the vessel was so crazy a craft that the engines caused the decks to vibrate, and us to vibrate at the same time like human jellies. Mrs. Reed sat on deck, wrapped up in shawls, till all resemblance to humanity disappeared; she

looked like those india-rubber toys of a head and body that you cannot upset. We stamped about as much as we dared on the crazy deck to try and keep ourselves warm, a large black dog meanwhile taking the greatest interest in our movements. He would watch us for a moment; and when he got one of us well up in a corner, he would block the way and bark furiously till it pleased him to desist and release us from our perilous position. This continued at intervals of five minutes. The drover was ever hunting his pigs, his language grew worse, and the pigs grew more strident in their remonstrances. Still we made but little progress; a sea fog came on; we might make the mouth of the Avon with luck, perhaps not; then we should lose the tide and have to wait outside. At last we did get into the Avon—but the trip up the Avon and its pretty banks! Why, it was

dark! At last we moored alongside the Quay. Demon boys were letting off crackers in honour of Guy Fawkes' Day; the pigs created an awful pandemonium; the drover's whiplash caught me across the cheek; there were twenty-four pieces of private luggage to pick out, and I did what was the most natural and most foolish thing to do under the circumstances: I lost my temper, and the drover and I entered into a friendly rivalry of language.

I remember the difficulties of performing *Ages Ago* in Clifton so well. There were no dressing-rooms in those days in the Small Hall of the Victoria Rooms. We had to go quite early, clamber on to the platform with the aid of chairs, and dress behind the scenes as best we might. *Ages Ago* was a piece involving very quick changes of costume; how we did it I don't know! Then

the boards of the platform were not allowed to touch the walls by some three or four inches, and various small but necessary articles of apparel tumbled down between the boards and the wall, and had to be fished up from a dust-covered depth of three feet with a hooked stick.

But things are changed for the better now. Local authorities and proprietors have at length come to the conclusion that there are actors, singers, and entertainers who are used to some of the amenities of civilized life. They have at length grasped the fact that a zinc pail is not the pleasantest form of washing-basin. I mention one seaside resort where we dressed in a small room off the tap-room of a public-house, where there was a bagatelle-board. A very drunken frequenter of the tap-room insisted on trying to come in and play bagatelle, and finding

his efforts hopeless, revenged himself by abusing us horribly through the keyhole. It is only about three years since a fashionable inland watering-place possessed no better room for Entertainments than a hastily erected drill-shed. When our men arrived to put up the "fit-up" for our performance, they found the stage in possession of one old hen, trying to pick up an honest living on the boards. The ladies had to dress in the gun-room, where there was an overpowering and sickening smell of Rangoon oil; we men dressed in a sort of outhouse where pigeons were kept, and looking on to the dustbin of the Care-taker. The Care-taker's wife had been boiling greens for dinner; I say no more!

At Bournemouth some years ago we gave the Entertainment in a riding-school. The men's dressing-rooms were across the court-

yard. I was dressed as a stage parish beadle, artificially fattened (it was years ago!), and with a portentous red bulbous nose. In this costume, and by daylight, I had to run the gauntlet of all the grooms and stable-helps. I have dressed in vestries of disused Methodist chapels, "made up" on the remains of the pulpit; dressed also in a cellar with an inch or two of water here and there on the floor; and at Dover, years ago, our dressing-room was not a room, but a space of some six square feet, separated from the front row of stalls only by a thin piece of green baize.

But things have improved so much nowadays, and plush and velvet reign in place of dirt and squalor. In one fashionable watering-place on the South Coast there are two theatres, besides bands, etc. They cannot both be made to pay. Such things are only possible in foreign watering-places where

there is gambling. The gambling tables pay for the amusement of the gamblers and non-gamblers, just as in this country the drinking bars provide the profit of a Promenade Concert.

For my part, I do not believe in theatres at our watering-places. I am not speaking of the Northern resorts which I do not know, but of the South Coast resorts which I do know, and I except Brighton, Portsmouth, and Plymouth. I think a well-ventilated hall would answer better, with the stalls and second seats on the area, and the shilling seats in a balcony. Let the seats be comfortable, not flashy vulgar plush for the stalls, but sufficient to ensure a reasonable amount of comfort. I *have* seen wooden kitchen-chairs, with a cheap antimacassar on the back, doing duty as four-shilling and five-shilling stalls. Then have a neat, compact

stage and footlights, drapery, curtains, and a nice scene painted, to shut off the larger portion of the stage when it is only required for concerts or meetings. By this means you make your theatre-going people comfortable, and the anti-theatre people do not object to the place because it is a theatre, that is to say, shaped and arranged as a theatre. At Bournemouth in days gone by there was a miserable building like a village schoolroom for Entertainments; then a Hall was built, not a bad place, but insufficiently lighted and wretchedly seated; then a theatre was built: we went down after a morning performance in town to open it, and I remember I said a "few words." Last year we found the theatre gutted and turned into some such sort of Hall as I have described, and we again assisted in opening the Hall under its new auspices. However, I am

rapidly straying away from my subject. To go back to the year 1870. We returned to town at Christmas, and shortly afterwards I produced a new sketch called *Baden-Baden*, and *broke down* in it on the first night before all the critics. Oh the misery of that night and of many succeeding nights! We produced *The Sensation Novel* of Mr. W. S. Gilbert; *Happy Arcadia*, by the same author, with Mr. Frederic Clay's music; *My Aunt's Secret*, by Burnand, with Mr. J. L. Molloy's music; *Very Catching*, by the same author and composer; and *Charity begins at Home*, by Mr. B. C. Stephenson, with Mr. Alfred Cellier's music—both gentlemen now so well known as the author and composer of *Dorothy*. We also produced a fanciful piece by the late Mr. Planché, called *King Christmas*. I remember that I played four characters in it, and so, I think, did Mr. Cecil, and Mr.

Alfred Reed, who had replaced his father, Mr. German Reed, on his retirement in 1871. How much younger and more sprightly we were in those days! Thursday was a double-performance day, and we used to dine at the Gallery of Illustration, and get up impromptu plays between the morning and evening performances!

July, 1873, saw the last of the old Gallery of Illustration, and we wandered homeless. I remember an agonizing journey about August of that year. I had to travel from Stafford, where I had been staying for a night or two, to Weston-super-Mare to join the company. The autumn manœuvres were on in Cannock Chase. The train due at Birmingham from Stafford was two hours late owing to this fact, and I missed the communicating train to Bristol. There was another which would arrive in Bristol to catch the train to Weston-

super-Mare, if we had luck. We had luck, but I suffered agonies. My head was for ever out of the window. I objurgated old ladies who would *not* settle on a carriage. I tried to work the train to greater speed with my legs and body, as if steering a boat; I worked myself into a fever. We arrived at Bristol. Hurrah! there was Arthur Cecil, who had had exactly the same experience from Canterbury, and we arrived at the Rooms at Weston-super-Mare, starving, dirty, and cross, just as the doors opened to admit the audience. Dear old Weston-super-Mare! It was at those very same Rooms that an old lady came up to one of the ladies of our company as she went up the stone steps and said, "Could you tell me, miss, if there are any two-shilling seats left? 'Cos if there aren't *I'll go to church!*"

It was during that tour that we all arrived

rather late at Reading, after a very long cross-country journey, to find that our agent had clean forgotten all about the performance. He had hired the Hall, but had done nothing more—never advertised the Entertainment or anything of the sort. Our stage luggage was detained till we paid the hire of the Hall, and we slunk off to London with our tails between our legs. The agent had left previously ; he arrived in the town, found out his error, uttered one wild cry, and was seen no more for ten days.

At Christmas Mr. Arthur Cecil left us to make his *début* on the *real* stage, and Mr. Arthur Law joined us. The elections in February, 1874, stopped all touring, and at Easter we opened at St. George's Hall with a revival of *Ages Ago*, in which Miss Leonora Braham made her first appearance. Again, after a short season, we toured, and

Christmas, 1875, saw us permanently settled at St. George's Hall.

On January 1st, 1877, Mr. Alfred Reed and myself commenced partnership, and had the luck to produce a very successful little after-piece, *Our Dolls' House*, by Mr. W. Yardley, with music by Mr. Cotsford Dick. I played Noah, and my dress was a calico-covered wire cage in which I could scarcely move, much less walk, run, or go up and downstairs. Had the place caught fire, there could have been no hope for me; I was helpless, and totally unable to get out of it without assistance.

We produced a new version of this piece a few years later, and a toy rabbit appeared, beating a drum in the well-known toy-rabbit style. The toy rabbit was a small boy. A year or two ago I went into a shop in the Lowther Arcade to buy toys, and a youth

of about sixteen waited on me. When my purchases were completed, he said, "I hope you are quite well, sir. I had the pleasure of playing with you once in a piece. I am the toy rabbit!" Personating toys at eight years of age, selling them at sixteen!

Mr. Alfred Reed and myself have now completed our eleventh year of management. During that period we may safely claim one merit: we have not been idle. We have produced forty-five new pieces, besides several revivals, which involve just as much trouble in rehearsing. Our authors include Messrs. Arthur Law (who heads the list with nineteen pieces), Burnand, Gilbert A'Beckett, Arthur A'Beckett, Yardley, H. P. Stephens, Malcolm Watson, Herbert Gardner, Comyns Carr, G. W. Godfrey, and others; our list of composers Messrs. Eaton, Faning, King, Hall, Caldicott, Grossmith, Arthur Cecil, Cotsford

Dick, Hamilton Clarke, Alfred Scott Gatty, German Reed, Lionel Benson, George Gear, and others.

In the production of these pieces Mr. Alfred Reed has been the prime mover. To him is due any credit there may be in rehearsing and placing them on the stage. I have done nothing or next to nothing in all those troublesome and wearying preparations of which the general public is quite ignorant. A lady once said to me in surprise, "Do you have to rehearse? I thought you just learnt the words at home and went on and said them."

Our little pieces are not gigantic productions, but they generally take a good five weeks' rehearsal, as our time is a good deal cut up by three morning performances a week; and then at times we have members of our company who, although trained singers.

have no experience of acting. It is not their fault, but the fault of our existing, or rather non-existing, systems of teaching and opportunity of practice. Well, they have to be taught at rehearsal, and often after rehearsal. All of this work has been undertaken and carried out by Mr. Alfred Reed, and only those who have done it know how wearing and tiring this work is. Poor Mr. North Home, whose untimely death we all felt so much last year, was a case in point. He came to us in November, 1881. He was a Royal Academy student, but, though a trained singer, he had no experience whatever of stage work. Mr. Reed worked and worked, till he became fairly proficient.

When I think of the work done by Mr. Reed, I feel rather guilty. My only consolation is that I have produced about thirty-eight sketches in our eleven years of manage-

ment, out of a grand total of fifty-six produced since May, 1870. This may be a matter of congratulation to myself, though not to others. I offer them my humble apologies, and hope to gain their forgiveness when I tell of some of the difficulties connected with my particular branch of the Entertainment.

CHAPTER III.

My Sketches and How to Write Them—"A Confounded Quick Study"—High Pressure—My Private Income—Cairo, and Christy Minstrels—French as She is Spoke—"Emma Parry"—A Cure for Sea-Sickness—Hymns and Bagpipes—Mr. Chorley—A Fellow Professor—Some Snubs—A Champagne Adventure—A Terrible Moment—And a Sad Ending—Tennyson—Taglioni—Beaconsfield.

I AM sometimes asked what my system is in writing Sketches. I don't know; I have no system, except that of putting off everything to the very last. I write down notes on odd pieces of paper, on the backs of envelopes, on margins of newspapers, on invitation cards, in fact on anything that comes handy. Sometimes I buy a twopenny washing account-

book and make little notes with a dash, thus: —. This last mystic sign means "music," to be worked out at the piano. Then, when the sketch is produced, I tear up the notes, and trust in the future to memory. What is the good of preserving sketches of a purely ephemeral nature, things lightly put together in a slight conversational style, only fitted to last some few months? The sketches must go out of fashion as quickly as the manners and customs they attempt to portray. In sketches of this description one deals with passing manias: the mania, perhaps, for putting bows of ribbon on incongruous pieces of furniture; for painting drain-pipes and panels of doors with lilies and daffodils; for giving a cheap Japanese appearance to a thoroughly European room by means of paper fans, screens, and umbrellas; for filling a drawing-room with so much furniture that

it needs a guide to enable the bewildered traveller to avoid the pitfalls of *poufs*, ottomans, and little tables ; for ladies to dance in amateur ballets, accompanied by their sisters and cousins and aunts on banjo, bones, and mandolines ; or for young men to wear bangles—*gages d'amour* which *will* show themselves, much to the outward annoyance but inward delight of the wearers. All these things are but the follies of the hour ; and if you wish for a record of such things, there are the pages of *Punch*, than which no better social recorder exists.

On one or two occasions I have been sorely put to it to be ready in time, for instance during the last weeks of 1886. The title of my Christmas sketch, *Oh ! that Boy !* was advertised. Thus far had I got, when we closed during the week before Christmas, in order to give six performances

at Bath, Bristol, and Cheltenham : an afternoon and evening at Bath on Monday, ditto at Bristol on Tuesday, ditto at Cheltenham on Wednesday. Mr. Alfred Reed fell ill, and I undertook to play his part as well as sing my own sketch. I went down to Bath on Saturday night, and felt as if I was going to knock up myself. However, I couldn't afford the time; the part had to be learnt by Monday. I worked and worked, but not one word could I remember. As a rule, I am like Mr. Lenville in "Nicholas Nickleby," and am a "confounded quick study," but on this occasion the memory would not work. I was in despair ; I couldn't sleep, and grew more miserable hour by hour. However, I managed to conquer in the end. All this time I had hoped to devote to my new sketch ; but what with study, travelling, and two performances *per diem,* I found on my

return to town on Thursday that I had done nothing. The same evening I had to sing at a private house at Woodford, consequently no work done. Friday morning I mapped out one song and the opening of the sketch ; *i.e.*, about five minutes out of the necessary thirty-five or forty. I had promised to go and spend Saturday (Christmas Day) and Sunday in Hertfordshire. I went down on Friday at dinner-time, saying to myself that in a large country-house I should be sure to find a room where I could shut myself up at times and work. Not a bit of it! How that sketch was ever done and brought out I do not know. I shudder to think of it. My servant, who acts as my home adviser and critic, tells me he suffered agony during the performance; he never knew what I was going to say next—nor did I! This is, of course, an exceptional case. Had it not been

for the unfortunate mishap of illness of one of our company and the sudden necessity of study on my part, I should have had ample time. However, all's well that ends well ; but I do not care to repeat the dose.

Singing at private concerts involves much railway travelling, especially as I have three nights in the week when I am free, the Entertainment being given in the afternoon of those days at St. George's Hall. These free nights are very useful, as they enable me to accept engagements for private concerts in many parts of the country. But the wear and tear of the work is sometimes very great. Supposing I just catch a 5.30 or 5.40 train ; that means no dinner. Then on arrival at the house I have to dress, sing, and wait till supper for my long-deferred meal, then up to town next morning, with perhaps another journey, as happened on one occasion two

or three months ago. I sang at Cambridge after a morning performance in town, had to leave by the 8.51 a.m. for Liverpool Street, went home, changed to the frock-coat of afternoon respectability, went to Victoria Station at twelve o'clock, arrived at Eastbourne at 2.20 p.m., sang two sketches, returned to town, arriving at 7.50 p.m., and sang that night at St. George's Hall. And in spite of this I am told, or my friends are told, that I only sing to amuse myself, because I have £9,000 a year of private income!! This amazing fiction was solemnly repeated a few weeks ago to one of my friends, coupled with the remark that it was a shame I went on singing, because it was nothing more or less than taking the bread out of other singers' mouths. However, my friend was connected by marriage with my family, and soon convinced the astonished gentleman that

my private income was, alas! absolutely *nil!*

There is an old cabman often on the rank at St. George's Hall who is apparently immensely struck by my frequent railway journeys. Anywhere out of the London radius is a sort of unexplored territory to him, and he looks upon any one venturing into these regions as a bold and venturesome being, holding his life in his hands.

I was leaving the Hall a week or two ago for some town, I forget which. My servant called a cab, and put in my portmanteau. The old cabman, who was watching the process, said, "What! your guv'nor off again! Well, he *is* a wunner for going about. Where is it to-night—the South-eastern? Paddington, is it? Well, he is a wunner! Why, talk of Stanley and the Dark Continent! Why, he ain't bloomin'

well in it with *your* guv'nor. Ye never know where to 'ave *'im!*"

"Tell me of some of the people you have met," says my Interviewer. Poor Interviewer! he has not had a chance of getting a word in for some time.

By far the most amusing people I have met have been people entirely unknown to fame. During my various travels, whether at home or abroad, I have met very droll people. I remember a certain gentleman when I was returning from Cairo in 1878. He was on board the *Mœris*, a Messageries Maritimes steamer. He had been in Cyprus. We asked him whether there were many antiquities in the Island. "Antiquities!" he cried. "Why, the place is *alive* with them!" On being questioned as to the mosquitoes, he informed us that they flew about like partridges, and barked like dogs. On

arrival at Marseilles, he confessed that he had a large tin box full of tobacco, and he was rather doubtful of his success in smuggling it through the Custom-house. But he was equal to the occasion. The *douanier* asked him what the tin box contained. "*Aoh ça!*" he said, "*ça c'est le médecin!*" The idea of tinned doctor so tickled the official that he at once passed it.

During the whole of our eight-day voyage this same gentleman could not find out my name. At length we arrived in Paris, and breakfasted at the Grand Hôtel. After looking at me long and earnestly, he said, "Somehow I seem to know your face! Now what *is* your name?" I replied that my name was Corney Grain. "Of course," he said, as a sudden light burst upon him. "I know now! *Christy Minstrels!!*"

What fun I have had during my two visits

to Cairo, the pleasantest holidays in my life! Then I remember me well of a certain Irish surgeon on the way to the Pyramids, during my second visit to Cairo. He insisted that we should stop half-way and have whiskies and sodas. The hamper was produced, and one of the party was holding a soda-water bottle in a direct line with the said surgeon's eyes. "Bedad!" he cried. "Do ye moind houlding that soda-wather bottle the other way? I've met so many mess-waithers with one oi!"

In the matter of English-French I never met any one to equal an old friend of mine; he was so outspoken and so unabashed, he cared not how much people laughed. The scene was Monte Carlo in the gambling rooms. He had won, and a lady took his winnings, a daily occurrence in that charming resort. He claimed them from the bank; the croupiers took no notice, so he threw

a five-franc piece into the wheel when it was in motion. Needless to say, a row ensued. He cared not one jot, but rising in his wrath, and emphasizing his remarks with his doubled fist—a brawny one, by the bye—he thus delivered himself: "*Voilà ma mise; j'ai gagné, et j'expecte d'être payé; je ne suis pas venoo à Monte Carlo ni pour voller*" (voler) "*ni pour menter*" (mentir), "*et si l'administration ne poo pas payer, elle faudrait fermer la boutique!*"

There was a roar of laughter, mingled with cries of "*A la porte,*" etc. Thumping the table with his fist, he shouted, "*Si ong me touche, je le too-e-rai*"!! He got his money!!

Then there was another of my friends who wanted a clean hot plate, and asked for "*un plat blanchisseuse chaud*"!

And then the row with the *sergents de ville*

in Paris! where my broad-fisted friend knocked them down right and left, and on being confronted next day with one of his victims, a very wizened little man, said in tones of infinite scorn to the magistrate, "*Ça ! ! Cette chose ! ! ! Si je l'aurais touché, je l'aurais too-é ! ! ! !*"

One gem of pronunciation comes back to me. The story was told me by a friend who was at the Opera. He entered into conversation with his next-door neighbour in the amphitheatre; they discussed various melodies, till my friend's next-door neighbour summed up the discussion thus: "Well, my favourite melody of all is 'Emma Parry'!" My friend pondered and pondered. Who was "Emma Parry"? Any relation of the great John Parry? At last in despair he asked what opera it was in. "In *Martha*!" Still he pondered. The opera he was listen-

ing to had no longer any charm for him—that magic name kept ringing in his ears. Emma Parry had taken possession of him; he rushed out, went to the nearest refreshment bar, and when asked what he would take, replied, "Emma Parry and soda;" he rushed to the Underground station: "Third-class for Emma Parry," he cried; he felt his wits going; he reached home; his wife noticed he was strange, heard him murmuring, "Emma Parry!" her jealous fears were aroused; confidence reigned no more in that hitherto peaceful and happy home. In the middle of the night he arose with a start. "I have it," he yelled: "*M apparì ! ! !*" Pronounce the "M" by itself, and then say "*apparì*," and you get "Emma Parry"!

Another gem I possess is in writing; it is a washing-bill presented to me in Cairo in 1884. I give it literally :—

"Dicembre 1884 Cairo
conto Di biancarie

52
Doxen 4 ($\frac{1}{2}$ a shilling
Doxen $3\frac{1}{2}$ (Maik
a shillig $15\frac{1}{2}$
Landry"

All I know is that I paid fifteen shillings and sixpence. The rest is to this day a mystery.

I met a very old and very quaint American lady in Venice once. She came up to me and said, "I know what you are and what you do. I hope you'll give some of your funny things to-night." I explained that I was holiday-making, and I was going to meander lazily in a gondola that night. Apparently resenting my refusal to sing, she retorted, "Wall, I think you're the least funny-looking man I ever met!" There was another American lady on board a British

India steamer when I went to Cairo in 1884. She was piling up large heaps of jam and buttered toast on a plate. "What *are* you going to do with that, madam?" said an astonished old gentleman. "Sir," she said, "I am doing unto others as I would be done by: I am taking this to a sick friend on deck!" If anybody, friend or otherwise, ever brings me jam and buttered toast when I'm sea-sick, I'll fall on them and crush them!

This charitable American lady was the wife of a missionary on board. There were some six or seven of them, and they sang such doleful hymns, vulgar, sugar-and-watery sort of negro-minstrel melodies with sacred words adapted to them. There is nothing to my mind so uncongenial as the commonplace hymn-tune, the hymn-tune that smacks of the bones, banjo, and tambourine.

Still on Sunday evenings up and down they paced, singing these clap-trap tunes in strong and vigorous tones. At last they began "God save the Queen." "Ha!" we exclaimed, "at last there is a straightforward, simple melody, and, moreover, it shows that the end is at hand." Not a bit of it. They had adapted words to it of their own, and the end was as far off as ever.

There was a silent but humorous Scotchman on board, and never a word spake he, but he silently went to his cabin. Still on and on went our loud-voiced minstrels, up and down, up and down, regardless of the feelings of quiet elderly ladies in the saloon writing letters to the friends to whom they had said good-bye for years or for ever, regardless of the sick people moaning in their berths. Suddenly there stole on our ears a faint, weird sound. Not pig-killing on

Sunday? No! nearer and nearer it came. The Relief of Lucknow! 'Twas the bagpipes!! Blessings on your head, my bonnie Scotch laddie! Blaw your pipes!! Hoot awa'!!! That "Hieland Lament" did it. We saw our American cousins no more for twenty-four hours.

It is pleasant at times to meet with sympathy in one's work. I know nothing so cheering as the kindly meant, kindly spoken word of encouragement from the really sympathetic listener; it cheers one up and incites to renewed efforts, and you feel you have not lived in vain. I myself felt I had not lived in vain when a gentleman said to me at the end of a rather trying sketch, "That must be hard work, Mr. Grain, almost as bad as selling cards on a race-course!"

Again, a word of discouragement is apt

to send the spirits of a sensitive person to zero. To arrive in a watering-place as we did once with our company, and for the landlord of the hotel to say, "I am afraid you won't do very much to-night, gentlemen. There's a menagerie here with a wonderful performing monkey that's drawing the whole town"! He was right—all the "best people" went to the monkey. There was a rough-and-ready criticism overheard at Southsea on the pier by one of our company. I had just passed a group of London 'Arries and 'Enriettas who knew me by sight. "There's Corney Grain" (pronounced Grine), said one fair maid, pausing for a moment in a succulent but somewhat pungent meal of "s'rimps." "Is 'e amusin' off the staige?" "No!" said 'Arry, as he wittily flicked the tail of a shrimp on to an old lady's bonnet; "none of them artists ever are!" "Right

you are, 'Arry!" to use your own choice phraseology; at all events, you are not far wrong in many instances.

But, *per contra*, I have always treasured up a remark made to me by a dear, good bishop, now, alas! dead and gone. He sat with a rug round his episcopal legs, for he felt the cold. He listened, and, I am proud to say, "chuckled," if it be a right and proper term to use about a bishop. I was presented to him. He was a dear, kindly old gentleman, and in his kindliest tones he said, "Thank you, Mr. Grain; I have been not only amused, but *edified*!"

This reminds me of my first and only conversation with the late Mr. Chorley, the musical critic. I was very young at the time, and arrived punctually at the house where I was asked to dine. I have now come to the conclusion that it is useless to

be punctual in certain London houses; I do not see why I should arrive at eight o'clock in order to wait twenty minutes for some one else. However, I think on this occasion I was before my time. My hostess had not come down, but Mr. Chorley was seated in a large armchair; he gave me a look as I came in, but knowing me not, retired within himself again. I felt nervous and uncomfortable; I thought I ought to try and break the ice. I went up to him and said, "Mr. Chorley, I think." I heard a curious little piping voice, issuing from the depths of the armchair, saying, "*I think so!*" I said no more, but retired snubbed and abashed. But I felt relieved at dinner when Mr. Chorley seemed out of temper with the Robertson plays which were then in full swing at the old Prince of Wales's Theatre. "These Robertson plays," he said, "annoy

me with their monosyllabic titles, such as *Caste*, *Ours*, and *School*. We shall have *Birth* and *Baptism* next." *Baptism* I thought scarcely monosyllabic, but I held my tongue, and contented myself with reflecting that, after all, the severest critic is but mortal!

I remember another reproof I received from a member of my profession at Hastings. He was one of an outdoor concert-party on the beach. He had blacked his face. It was some years ago. Nowadays he would wear a small mask and call himself "A Disguised Nobleman," and what is more, have found people to believe him. He sang "I traced 'er little footsteps in the snow," and I fear he was not in good voice. He then went round with the hat. I gave him sixpence, but with rather a stand-off air, as though I knew not singers and their

Bohemian ways. But *he* knew *me*, for as he took my sixpence he hoarsely whispered, "'Ard work, Mr. Grain, our profession; but there! *you* don't know what it is! Why, I'd sooner do *twenty* of your shows in a room than *one* of mine on the beach!"

Sometimes one singer will *not* take you, another singer, at the value you put on yourself. I have found it so in the case of a very great music-hall "artiste." "The Great One" was singing at a supper-party given by some cheery souls. Uproarious was the applause. Song succeeded song. At last, to give him a rest, they asked me to sing something. I went to the piano and chose some little imitations of German, French, and Spanish songs. I knew I could not compete with "The Great One," so I had better seek something that would contrast with his songs. He listened very indulgently, and when I

had finished, he turned to one of the guests and said, "H'm! I wish I'd had the bringing out of that fellow. What an artist I'd have made of him!"

I am always getting snubbed like this; even praise takes a dubious form when an old gentleman says to you, "We went to hear you last night, and thought you'd rather improved." *Rather improved!* No! I do not like the term. *Better than ever* would have flattered my vanity more. But then one must take what one can get, and be thankful, though it be trying at times to one's vanity or dignity.

My dignity I have found seriously assailed on many occasions. Once at Ryde, long years ago, Mr. Reed and I walked down to the pier one Sunday morning. We were to play the next day, and our agent had undertaken to bring the luggage and scenery from

Portsmouth. It came that very Sunday morning as we arrived on the pier. It looked so wicked and improper by daylight, so disreputable! We tried to ignore it, but the agent called to us by name, and the name "German Reed" was on every package in large letters. The pier was crowded.

"Bill," said a railway porter, "what's all this?"

"'Ow should I know?"

"It's a Punch and Judy show," said a pert bystander.

The crowd looked at Mr. Reed and myself and laughed. At last, nettled at our loss of dignity, we told the agent he should not have brought it over on Sunday.

"What nonsense!" he replied. "Why, it's a jolly good advertisement!"

I felt that my dignity was seriously imperilled on one occasion, and by my own

greediness. I stayed for the night in a house after a concert ; my host and hostess were most kind and hospitable, but did not understand the ways of singers who are fond of a little supper after their work. I went again, and knowing how pained my host and hostess would be if any hint I gave showed that I had not had enough supper on my previous visit, I took a packet of sandwiches and a pint of champagne with me for a private supper in my bedroom. Alas ! the bedroom of my kind hosts was next to mine, and the walls were very thin. How was I to open the champagne and not allow the "pop" to be heard ? I couldn't do it under the bedclothes ; it might be "up," and overflow. How would it do to give a great cough at the precise moment of the "pop" ? I tried it. The cork wouldn't come out, but I gave a cough that would awaken the

dead. A knock at my door. It is my host. "Mr. Grain," he said, "I fear you have a bad cough. I have brought you these lozenges; they are infallible. I'll guarantee you won't cough after one or two of them." I thanked him. "I hope you are quite comfortable," he said; "is your bed all right?" Horror! he was making for it, and I had hidden the pint of champagne in it when he knocked! "It's delicious," I said, as I in despair sat on the bottle, "soft as eider-down." "What!" he said. 'Why, they've never given you a feather-bed! Let me feel!" He felt the bottle. "What on earth is this?" "My hot-water bottle," I said. "I never travel without." "Hot-water bottle in a warm September? What must you want in January?" "Oh, I'm a chilly mortal!" I said, feeling hot all over. "Well, you don't look it," he said. "No!"

I said. "The ice-plant *looks* warm, but it isn't!" "Well, good-night," he said, "and don't you let me hear that cough again, or I'll get my wife to send you some of her own pet remedies, and you won't forget *them* in a hurry, *I* can tell you!"

Good heavens! What a position! Here was I, deceiving my kind friends, and plunging into a slough of deceit and falsehood from which there was apparently no escape. Meantime the wretched pint of champagne was in the bed, the top of the cork had broken off, and it was liable to go off at any moment. If it did, my host might think I was ill, and would probably come with some of his wife's horrible pet remedies. *He* had apparently survived them, but they would probably kill *me*. What was I to do? Should I wrap up the bottle in all the towels, put it in the bath, and leave it to take its

chance? Should I fill the bath with water and submerge it? If I adopted this plan, would the explosion, if it occurred, be audible in the next room? If I threw the bottle out of the window, it would be making a horrible noise when it smashed, and would probably alarm the neighbourhood, living as it did in perpetual apprehension of burglars. I was loath to lose the champagne, but I only possessed a scent-bottle corkscrew. I resolved to do it or die. I broke the corkscrew. Luckily my knife possessed a thing for picking stones out of a horse's hoof. This was the first time I had ever known such a thing to be useful, and even then not for the purpose for which it was intended. I must have picked at that cork for an hour. At last there came a faint fizzing sound. The critical moment was approaching; I listened; all quiet; not a sound except a faint nasal duet in the adjoin-

ing apartment. Hurrah! the cork is out! a noiseless victory! Now for my long-deferred drink——

It was corked!!

But I fear I am wandering away from the answer to my Interviewer's question as to people I have met. Well, I have sung before "all sorts and conditions of men," from Royal Personages to the "Two-Headed Nightingale." But I have little to record about them that would interest or amuse. A polite word or two, and the conversation, if any, has ended.

I shall always remember the visit of the "Two-headed Nightingale" to the old Gallery of Illustration in Regent Street. It must have been some time during the summer of 1872. The difficulty was to find comfortable seats to suit the peculiarity of their anatomy. But the temporary short-

comings of our stalls in the shape of a missing division-arm proved of the greatest service. Their dress was somewhat startling, —pale blue, with pink rosebuds in their hair, and pale blue gloves, contrasting somewhat oddly with their black skins. When they laughed, they did so with perfect unanimity, both bodies bending forward in unison. During that season we were also honoured by the visit of Commodore Nutt and Miss Minnie Warren, diminutive little folk with tremendous assumption of dignity. When Commodore Nutt in shrill tones said, "We have enjoyed the Entertainment very much," there was something regal in it, though the memory reverted unconsciously to Mr. Simon Tappertit in "Barnaby Rudge."

I once sang before Lord Tennyson, and began a song of mine called "The Old Gown," which contained towards the finish

a paraphrase of two well-known lines by that great poet. I suddenly recollected this fact, and how I got out of the mess I do not know, but I floundered about and never finished the song. I thought I would sooner allow the audience to think that my memory had failed me, than face the stern glances of the Poet Laureate. It was at a private party, and he was sitting in the first row of chairs, immediately in front of me.

I remember, too, with how much pleasure I met Madame Taglioni during her residence in England,—a quiet, gentle old lady, with charming manners.

I fear the late Lord Beaconsfield did not take much to my songs. I sang before him once or twice; and he told me that he liked my imitation of the cornopean best, an imitation I was never proud of, as it is commonplace and exceedingly easy of attainment.

Undoubtedly amongst celebrities the best audience one can have is one composed of great musicians. They know the difficulties of the task, and are always charitable to your shortcomings. I have sung before Herr Joachim, Strauss, Piatti, Madame Norman Néruda, Mr. Charles Hallé, and other well-known exponents of classical music, and found them the most appreciative of listeners.

But I know no more interesting study than the varieties of audiences. Sometimes in one week during the season I sing before nine or ten different "sets" in various parts of London, and I can only repeat that, wherever it may be, they treat me with the greatest kindness and hospitality. I have heard stories of singers being treated with rudeness. All I can say is that I have never found it myself.

CHAPTER IV.

Some Polite Enquirers—What is Fame?—My Age—Some Autobiographical Notes—My Nationality—Some Unknown Relatives—Casual Acquaintances—Falls from the Pinnacle of Self-esteem—"So Good for One"—My First Experience of Private Parties—Funny Men and Their Trials—Pianos and Pianos—What is Expected—Hints to Beginners—A Question and its Answers—Finis.

IF occasionally "things one would rather have left unsaid," or "things one would rather have left undone," have occurred, they have simply been the result of that thoughtlessness which characterizes us all at times—a thoughtlessness the perpetrator would be the first to acknowledge and—laugh at.

If I have found eccentricities in them, they have no doubt noticed the same in me.

After all, it is but water on the duck's back; we shake it off, and in five minutes the annoyance, if any exist, is forgotten, and we can shake hands and make merry over the recollection.

How monotonous our daily life would be without peculiarities! They are the sauces that give character and flavour.

I sometimes think that my experiences must be somewhat similar to those of waiters. They must see much the same sort of society —like myself, they are "in the movement"— they look after the tea and ices; I am in the music department. But the waiter has this advantage: he entrenches himself behind an outwork of tables, and in the intervals of repose can silently contemplate the ice-pails and the maid who is "washing up."

But I am not so lucky. I am often button-holed and put through a catechism:

"How *do* you remember it all?" "Doesn't it fatigue you very much?" "Do you never catch cold?" "What do you do when you have a cold?" "Aren't you very tired of singing the same thing over and over again?"

But the person I like is the middle-aged man of blatant voice and retired-military-man appearance and manner, who comes up and says, "Um—er—that's rather good, really quite amusin'. I wonder—ah!—er—how you can remember all that nonsense!"

That class of man never pronounces the final "g." It is curious that it should be considered a sign of vulgarity to leave out the initial "h," while the "best people" take especial pains to do away with the final "g."

But who can account for the vagaries of Fashion?

For instance, who first introduced the

present system of shaking hands in vogue among a certain set of "smart" London ladies? Why should the hands be lifted to the level of the shoulder, and then waggled to and fro horizontally? It is idiotic, but "the thing." And what does not Fashion do for music and musicians!

I think more humbug surrounds music than any other branch of art.

People are so afraid of saying what they really like, and will suffer tortures rather than confess that they hate classical music. I *did* find a lady the other day who at last spoke the truth as to the form of entertainment she liked; but even then she was half-hearted, and took shelter behind illness.

It was a question between a circus and a classical concert. The circus carried the day. "Since my recent attack of neuralgia," wrote the lady, "I am not equal to classical music."

It was the truth, I am sure, but the neuralgia was used as a scapegoat.

However, far be it from me to complain. The "Five o'Clock Tea" and the "At Home" have been very good friends to me, and have provided me with much amusement, combined in many instances with instruction.

It is instructive, and a very healthy discipline, to find how little is known of many public men whose writings and doings you think a matter of world-wide interest.

I often find myself completely nonplussed in houses—both in town and country—by the fact that, when I tell the last good story I have heard at the Club about So-and-so, no one knows anything about the individual, though his novels, poems, or what not may "lie on every drawing-room table."

It is healthy discipline to apply this ignorance to your own case, and it gives very

much the same sort of moral shock to your conceit that the traveller experiences on his return from abroad. He cannot imagine how the fellows at the Club can have got on without him; he can hear them in his imagination saying, "Where's old Dick? Why isn't he here? The Club don't seem like the same Club without old Dick." He rushes into the smoking-room, and one man notices him and says, "Oh! how are you? Have you been away?"

Then, on the other hand, there is the extraordinary knowledge of one's private affairs by the general public—a knowledge as minute as it is inaccurate. And I sometimes think, in my own case, if they can take the trouble to invent so much about a comic singer, how much more must they invent about an eminent statesman or Royal personage. And the public is so confident in

its own infallibility, it will brook no contradictions. The first and original report remains in the public memory, the contradiction of it but seldom.

I was amused a season or two ago when a gentleman came up to me at an evening party and said, "You wear wonderfully well going on singing all these years as you do I wonder how you stand it at your time of life!" "Well," I said, "I'm not so very old; I'm only forty, and you talk of me as if I were fifty-five." "Oh, come," he said, "you're more than that; you're at least fifty-five if you're a day. Why, I've known you singing for these last twenty-five years!" I said, "I beg your pardon; I made my *début* May 16th, 1870, at the age of twenty-five." "Oh, nonsense!" he said; "you're fifty-five if you're a day." I left him, merely remarking that I had no doubt he was right, and I *was*

fifty-five; and I only hoped I should carry my years as well as he did when I reached *his* age. He was about forty-five in reality. And the funny thing is that he thought I was rather rude to him, *his* remarks having been the perfection of taste and tact.

Were I asked to give a short, true, and succinct account of my life, I should do it in the following manner:—

Surname . .	. Grain.
Christian name .	. Richard Corney.
Condition . .	. Bachelor.
Born . . .	. Oct. 26th, 1844.
Education . .	. Average middle class.
Profession . .	. { Barrister April 30th, 1866. { Entertainer May 16th, 1870.

And there it is "up to now!" But this is too commonplace a record of the truth for the public. I have been greeted as an old army man, an old naval man, and introduced

to men who remembered me so well at Oxford or Cambridge, the latter rather shaking my belief in the veracity of man, seeing that I was never at any College or at any University.

My professional income is and has been stated for years to be £10,000. I am glad to hear it; but some one must have reduced it considerably *in transitu*.

I have been twice to Egypt during the last nine years, the real reason being want of a little rest from daily work and shouting; but again the cause is too commonplace, and the public will accept nothing but "complete loss of brain-power" or "consumption," the first leading by a head.

I am also at all times pleased to hear of my approaching marriage; the approach has now taken ten years to complete. I am glad that the lady—widow at times, sometimes a spinster—is about the right age, and very

well off. Her people objected at first, but have at length come round, owing to my retirement from public life. The house I am going to inhabit has been pointed out. But there is a little "rift within the lute." No wedding presents have been sent, and I cannot ascertain the name of the lady. With Mrs. Gamp, I say most fervently and imploringly, "Give it a name!"

My unfortunate name is likewise the subject of much controversy. My parents played a very bad practical joke on me when they gave me the names in my baptism of Richard Corney. The proximity of Corney to Grain does look odd, I admit; but it is so written down in the Family Bible, and the Parish Registry of Teversham, Cambs. Sometimes I have letters addressed to Cornelius Grain—once a letter addressed "Cornet Grain"—and modest, retiring ladies sometimes

apologise for writing to me by my "theatrical name," as they do not know "my real one."

I am sometimes claimed as an Irishman—all through my surname, and I have come to the conclusion that on the whole it has been far more trouble than it is worth. Rather an amusing episode occurred in a provincial town with reference to my name. A gentleman stopped me in the street, and said,—

"Mr. Grain, I had the pleasure of meeting you some years ago, and I want to take this opportunity of introducing you to this young lady—a new cousin whom you have never seen."

I bowed; the young lady bowed; and I, bewildered, stammered out,—

"I think there must be some mistake. I never heard the name in connection with my family!"

"But," said the gentleman, "you are Mr. Chichester Bolton, are you not?"

I said the name was very beautiful and sonorous, but unfortunately I could not lay claim to it. I said my name was Grain.

"Your real name?"

"My real name."

"I am very sorry," he said, "to have made this mistake; but the caretaker of the Assembly Rooms here said your real name was Chichester Bolton; and this young lady has a cousin of that name whom she has never seen!"

Thus did I gain and lose a new name, and, what is more, a charming cousin, in something under three minutes.

There is a favourite little story anent my name which I have known, and welcomed with each fresh narrator as a novelty, for the last ten or twelve years. Two old ladies in

the country were asked to an "Afternoon," where I was going to sing; and, seeing my name in the corner of the card, asked if it was a sort of "harvest drink." It is told differently at times, but mine is the earliest extant edition. My only objection to the story is that the narrators are too peripatetic —they change the venue too frequently, and when they tell me that it happened last year to ladies of their acquaintance, I blush for them, for they are unblushing.

It often amuses me to watch the flounderings of people who, knowing you but slightly, and in all probability caring for you less, think it a friendly duty to show a great interest in your movements. You meet one of these casual acquaintances, and he says: "Oh! how are you? Let me see—you've been away, haven't you?

"No, only for my usual month's holiday."

"Oh! I thought you were seedy, and had to go to Egypt!"

"Oh, I've been back three years!"

"Oh!—but—you're not with the German Reeds still!"

"Yes; I have never been anywhere else."

"Oh! I'd got some idea in my head—ah!—you're *looking* very well—oh—good-bye." Retires discomfited. How much better to have stuck to our conversational friend the weather!

I remember once on board a steamer going to Alexandria an Irishman said to me, "Are ye in the surr-vice?"

I said, "No."

"What are ye, then?"

I said, "A singer."

"A singer? What do ye sing in? Opera?"

I said, "No."

"Concerts?"

"Not exactly," I said. "I sing in entertainment! Perhaps you know my name—I'm Corney Grain!"

"Oh!" he said, "I never hurd of ye!!"

These little falls from the pinnacle of self-esteem are unpleasant, but "so good for one."

Sometimes I have come across very neat "sayings one would rather have left unsaid." I was singing at an afternoon party, and I was the only "professional" there. A little boy played the violin. I remarked to my hostess that the boy showed signs of great promise. "Is he a professional?" I asked. "Oh! no," said my hostess; "he's the son of a gentleman!" The dear lady meant no offence; she only meant that the father was a man of means; but that she should have put

it in the way she did, and made the remark to the only professional in the room, was perhaps unfortunate.

Nervousness sometimes causes people to blurt out most inconvenient truths. I arrived once at a large house to sing at an "At Home." My host was a very nervous, shy man. I remarked, "You have two grand pianos in your drawing-rooms, I see!"

"Oh!—oh!—ye—yes!" said my host. "We hired the one that's open for this afternoon. My wife said, 'We can't let Corney Grain play on our best piano.' Ha! ha! ha!"

I laughed a hollow "Ha! ha! ha!" and went meekly to my hired companion for the afternoon.

Sometimes ladies sidle up and say in an undertone, "Be merciful, Mr. Grain. Our piano is a new one."

"Oh! pray don't apologise," I reply; "it'll do well enough for my work."

One of the most awkward incidents that occurred to me was when a gentleman said, "Oh! yes! we'll get him to sing that. Mr. Grain, do give us your sketch of 'The Drinking Fountain.' I think it's quite your best."

I said I would with pleasure but for the fact that I didn't know it, as it was Mr. Grossmith's sketch.

Then ensued an embarrassing silence, and the company in desperation rushed at the weather as a conversational relief.

Many years ago I was asked to sing at a lady's house. The lady was an excellent person of very Low Church views, and had doubts as to the wickedness of the comic song generally; but I believe her sons overcame her scruples, and she reluctantly con-

sented to engage my services. But the morning of the party she had misgivings, and I received a note from her hoping that I would make no *Scriptural allusions* in my songs.

I remember I was very hurt and angry at the time; but I was young then, and sensitive.

What agonies I endured when I first began to sing at private parties!

How hot and uncomfortable I felt when, having just concluded a medley song entitled "Romeo and Juliet," a lady asked me if that was "my charming sketch called 'Five o'Clock Tea;'" and when an old lady was put close to me with a large ear-trumpet, I thought I should have run away.

It was perhaps a little embarrassing to a young singer when a well-known lady of title said, "I should like you to come to my

house at 4.30. How long can you go on ?—for two hours at a stretch ?" I humbly submitted that a little break of five minutes or so would be pleasing, I thought, both to audience and singer. "Oh !" she said, "I didn't know. I thought you could. We had a conjurer last year who did."

It is embarrassing also when you have sung what you fondly imagine are the best things you do, and the son of the house comes up and says, "I say, sing us a real comic song—something funny."

Perhaps the most depressing thing is when you are called "a funny man ;" you are expected to be "funny" at all times and seasons, even at breakfast. The man who is funny at breakfast must be peculiarly constituted.

A friend of mine, a well-known actor and humorist, went to stay in a country house.

The children had evidently heard that he was a "funny man," for they rushed up to him on his arrival, and said, "Oh! Mr. So-and so, do be funny." He said he was tired with travelling, and dusty, and generally uncomfortable. "Oh! but," they said, "do say just one word of funniness!"

Some young men in a country house expressed themselves to a friend of mine as bitterly disappointed in me. I sang at the "At Home," and when the guests had gone, went, rather tired and worn out, to the smoking-room. The men all came in—waited—smoked, and gradually slunk off.

On meeting my friend they said they were much disappointed. "Why, we went to the smoking-room thinking he'd be funny and amuse us, and he just sat in a chair and smoked like anybody else!"

Well, I was a proof to those young men

that there was at least one other man who could be as dull as they.

What a variety of pianos I have come across! I played on one at a large London house of a nobleman which cost seven hundred guineas, and at another nobleman's house on one which my host with pride informed me he had picked up for twelve pounds! It was an old-fashioned square, with one pedal and six octaves, modern pianos having seven. Sometimes I find a cottage piano with the back turned to the audience, the back decorated with embroideries and plants, so that my only chance of being seen is by occasionally popping up over the top of it like a Jack-in-the-Green and a Jack-in-the-box combined.

But all these little petty annoyances fade when you get a cheery audience in a large room, a good piano, and room to move. Then I enjoy my work.

Singing to boys at a public school is perhaps the most delightful experience, they are so fresh, so young, and so appreciative of every point. You see, they are not bothered as grown-up people are. They are not rendered cross by the carriage not coming, or the horses being kept waiting. They don't care how they are dressed, or, what is more important, how other people are dressed; and, which seems to me to be the one constant thorn in the side of womankind, they are not wondering why the So-and-sos are not there, or what made the people ask the Thingummies. They are not "going on," as the poor wearied chaperons are, running in and out of drawing-rooms like disturbed rabbits in a warren; they have come to enjoy themselves: and, if cheers be any criterion, they do!

But there is one charge brought against

me from which I am anxious to clear myself.

A gentleman came to me to engage my services at an "Afternoon." It was all settled, when he said, "Then you don't want any screens or table—nothing but a piano?"

"Nothing, sir!"

"Ah! I didn't know whether you didn't put your head through a hole in a bit of cardboard and call yourself Mr. Gladstone!!"

That I have grinned through a horse-collar for many years is perhaps too true, but I most emphatically deny that I ever committed so heinous a political offence as to put my head through a hole in a bit of cardboard and call myself Mr. Gladstone!!

The difficulty I find is in procuring new subjects for sketches. Having produced fifty-six during my career, I sometimes

despair when I find it is time to produce something new. But I confess I like my work, and much more do I like it since I have given up playing in the pieces at the Entertainment. Acting is not congenial to me. I am not a good actor, and the fact was borne in upon me more and more as I grew older, and I was delighted when I could give it up and devote myself exclusively to the Sketches at the piano.

There are perhaps one or two little hints I could give to young beginners who intend to devote themselves to similar Entertainments. Do not give a caricature or imitation of any subject, be it in music or manners and customs, till you are tolerably certain that the original is thoroughly familiar to your audience. Some years ago, when Hungarian Bands began to be so popular, I gave an imitation of their style of playing. It fell

flat as ditch-water. Eighteen months ago I revived it in a Sketch, and it was a success. The audience had become familiar with the original in the interval.

I remember an instance of this at an evening party of very "smart" people where I was singing. I had sung, and a gentleman followed my Sketch with some imitations of actors. The audience enjoyed it till he came to an imitation of the late Mr. Compton. Nobody seemed to recognise it. At last one very "smart" lady whispered to her neighbour, "Who is it?" "Who is it?" said that lady to *her* neighbour. "Who is it?" said that lady to a gentleman sitting next to me. "Who is it?" whispered that gentleman to me. "Compton!" I replied. "Compton" — "Compton" — "Compton," was whispered down the line, till the name reached the original questioner. "Oh!

Compton, of course!" she said. "Very good —*how* like! Bravo! Excellent! Inimitable!!"

Moral: Give out the name of the person to be imitated beforehand.

One other piece of advice: Do not, I implore you, put things off to the last. I speak with authority, for I have done it all my life.

But the time has come when I can put off one thing no longer—namely, taking Farewell of my Readers.

When these Reminiscences were published in *Murray's Magazine*, I asked a question about a song I recollected as being my earliest impression of vocal music, a song sung to me by a very dear sister, whose loss I shall always deplore. I asked where it could be procured and whether it was in print. I have almost regretted asking the

question, though I fully appreciate the kindness of numerous correspondents who have sent me copies of the song. I almost regret asking the question because the number of copies of the song I have received renders it impossible for me to find time to acknowledge the kindness of my correspondents. I met a gentleman the other day who suddenly attacked me and said, "The next time you quote that song, Mr. Grain, quote correctly!" I replied that I believed I had quoted correctly the words sung to me, though the singer may have sung an incorrect version. Then my assailant went on to say, "I am, I suppose, the only man in London who possesses a copy of that song!" "Oh! no!" I said. "I possess about fifty already, and they are still coming in every week!"

I therefore take this opportunity of thanking all my correspondents. I would like to

do so by letter, but I quail before the task. I therefore pray them to accept my thanks and take the will for the deed.

On looking back at what I have said, I find that I have not had much to say, and that what I have said is not of much importance. I have put down these little Reminiscences as they occurred to me, without much idea of consecutive order, and in a somewhat hasty and desultory manner. Should they prove of any assistance in passing the time on a railway journey or stimulating sleep on retiring to bed, I shall be thankful, but not so thankful as I am to the Press and the Public who on so many occasions and during so many years have borne with me so patiently and treated my humble efforts so leniently.

R. CORNEY GRAIN.